



THE TAOS NEWS

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My Turn

Fair is fair

Robert J. Silver

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Given my persistent criticism of Holy Cross Hospital's board of directors, complimenting them comes as a complete surprise to me. While I have repeatedly criticized the hospital's governance and management, what's fair is fair, and their recent board appointment process deserves enormous credit. Indeed, I have unqualified praise for their stunning actions. It leaves me feeling something like a dog who has chased a car with no expectation of actually catching it. I would have given long odds that things wouldn't change in my lifetime. Go figure! In light of the substantive problems that beset the hospital, these dramatic and unprecedented steps may easily have been missed.

Heretofore, there had been little to suggest that the hospital board understood criticism that it was receiving. It seemed that they just didn't get it. But a monumental shift may now be taking place. As would have ideally been hoped, the board's nominating committee acted with intelligence, insight, independence, imagination, and integrity in proposing candidates to fill three vacant board seats. It courageously broke with long-standing tradition, placing its overarching duty to the hospital and to the community above all other considerations, and refusing to be hamstrung in seeking the most knowledgeable, talented, and able individuals within our community. This is, of course, as it should be.

Family ties notwithstanding, the committee resisted reflexively reappointing one board member whose term was expiring; it rejected blind obedience to an appointment scheme giving disproportionate weight to the location of a candidate's residence; and it apparently considered candidates strictly on their merits, focusing on what rather than whom a candidate might know. It's been reported that it even opened some of the committee's deliberative process to public observation.

The nominating committee was a model of admirable leadership, integrity, and political courage, unwilling to treat hospital bylaws and tradition as suicide pacts. Kudos to the members of the committee and especially to its chairman, Taos councilman Andrew Gonzales, for pursuing a more hopeful path!

To its great credit, a majority of the full hospital board then voted to stay the course its nominating committee had set. While not without dissent, a clear board majority agreed to follow the committee's lead, accepting and adopting its considered recommendations in full. This was likely a difficult and complicated step to take. Yet, it was the right thing to do, and an important step in gaining the community's trust and support.

Laudable as they may be, governance changes begun merely set the stage for reasoned and effective action.

Holy Cross is still faced with enormous financial and personnel issues. The palpable distress eloquently and uniformly expressed by the professional staff at the hospital's May board meeting suggests the presence of deep organization wounds. However, with new "blood" now in its board of trustees and a CEO replacement in the works, the hospital should be in a far better position to tackle these problems.

Looking ahead, there now is reason for increased faith in the hospital board's ability to effectively deal with the problems that confront it. The recent appointment process has been a legitimate one, ultimately conveying the opportunity to draw on the deepest knowledge and richest talent of our friends and neighbors in this treasured valley. There may, at last, be good reason for hope.

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